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Chief Executive Officer

May 26, 2010

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To: Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair
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From: William T Fujioka
Chief Executive Officer

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STATION WILDFIRE – LOS ANGELES COUNTY EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER AFTER ACTION REPORT

Situation Summary

On August 26, 2009, the Station Wildfire began on the Angeles Crest Highway, north of the United States Forest Service (USFS) Ranger Station. Concurrently, there were three active fires burning in Los Angeles County which required public safety personnel response. The Sheriff's Department (LASD) had personnel deployed for the Morris Fire, which began on August 24, 2009, and the Palos Verdes Fire, which began on August 27, 2009. While the latter fires were controlled within a few days, the Station Wildfire burned out of control until containment was declared on October 16, 2009.

Despite the lack of wind, the Station Wildfire spread rapidly by moving into areas fueled by thick brush which had no recorded history of burn. This was the largest fire in terms of acres burned and longest duration of resource deployment in Los Angeles County recorded history. All totaled, there were more than 160,500 acres burned and approximately 7,000 structures threatened during the course of this fire. Eighty-nine homes were destroyed and 13 more were damaged. In addition, 22 commercial structures and 22 outbuildings were destroyed. Tragically, two Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACoFD) firefighters lost their lives and an additional 22 injuries were reported. The estimated cost of this fire is currently at \$88,000,000. The Station Wildfire is now the tenth largest on record in California history. The cause of the fire has been determined to be arson and, as a result, a homicide investigation is underway.

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The following is an after action report on the completed efforts of each County department or agency partners involved in the Station Wildfire. Additionally, some departments/agencies have included recommendations to improve the process. The report of each department/agency has been organized in the following order:

- Chief Executive Office, Office of Emergency Management
- Los Angeles County Fire Department
- Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department
- Los Angeles County Department of Public Works
- Los Angeles County Internal Services Department
- Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services/American Red Cross
- Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care and Control
- Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation
- Los Angeles County Department of Public Health
- Los Angeles County Department of Community and Senior Services
- Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health
- Los Angeles County Probation Department
- Disaster Management Area Coordinators – AREA C
- Public Information and Community Outreach
- Attachment - Glossary of Acronyms and Terms

Chief Executive Office, Office of Emergency Management

Findings

The Office of Emergency Management (OEM) took the following actions in response to the Station Wildfire:

- Staffed the County Emergency Operations Center (CEOC) and provided a liaison to the Station Wildfire Incident Command Post (ICP).
- Added a representative from the Department of Animal Care and Control (ACC) to the CEOC.
- Coordinated press releases with other Operational Area (OA) agencies and also provided information to County 211 and other County websites.
- Recruited and trained a reserve cadre of CEOC staff obtained from County departments and other OA agencies.

- Provided daily information to OA agencies, California Emergency Management Agency (CalEMA), and various community-based and faith-based organizations.
- In conjunction with the Chief Executive Office, Information Technology Geographic Information System, staff provided updated maps of the fires including road closures, shelter sites, and other points of interests to various OA agencies.
- Coordinated with LACoFD and CalEMA to obtain an Administrative Disaster Declaration from the Small Business Administration to allow low interest recovery loans be available to persons with disaster losses.
- Coordinated the establishment and managed the operations of Local Assistance Centers (LAC) in Sylmar and Acton.

Emergency Proclamations:

The emergency proclamations made during this period were:

- County of Los Angeles Proclamation of a Local Emergency - August 28, 2009
- State of California - Proclamation of a State of Emergency Los Angeles County – August 28, 2009

Recommendations

- Under the auspices of the Disaster Services Worker and Department Emergency Coordinators Program, it is requested that each department designate employees to be trained for the Reserve CEOC Staff Program.
- Designate ACC as the lead department for handling incidents regarding the care and safety of animals including, but not limited to, the shelter and evacuation of animals.
- Procure appropriate vehicles (all-terrain) and communications equipment (satellite) for use by OEM staff deployed to ensure coordination between the CEOC Incident/Unified Command Post(s) and other appropriate emergency locations.

- Designate County 211 to expand its telephone information referral service to include disaster information which is currently posted on County websites and broadcasted on radio and television stations. County 211 can provide disaster information to members of the public that do not have access to other forms of information such as websites, radio, or television based disaster information sources.
- Work with the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) to provide a liaison position for the County 211 in DPSS' Department Operations Center (DOC) or CEOC as required.
- Reintroduce a LACoFD liaison to the roster of the emergency management staff of OEM (vacated July 2009).

Los Angeles County Fire Department

Findings

- LACoFD will be providing a separate detailed report to the Board of Supervisors which will include any recommendations in their response efforts to the Station Wildfire.

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

Findings

Field Deployment:

- The field deployment for law enforcement was managed by LASD Incident Management Teams (IMT) 5, 1, and 2, in that order. They worked out of the Emergency Operations Bureau (EOB) mobile command posts, which were first deployed at the Santa Fe Dam near Irwindale. As the Morris and Palos Verdes Fires were contained, a second command post was moved to Hansen Dam in the Lake View Terrace area of the City of Los Angeles. As the fire progressed east and north, the command posts were relocated back to Santa Fe Dam. The IMTs were staffed with LASD personnel. Each team was led by a LASD Commander. EOB personnel provided subject matter expertise and guidance to the teams throughout the event.

- Law enforcement joined LACoFD command staff in a unified command on August 28, 2009, to provide a cohesive and coordinated response to all phases of this event.
- Law enforcement missions for the Station Wildfire included the evacuation of over 7,000 homes and additional commercial areas, including the communications sites on Mount Wilson. Security for the evacuated areas remained intact until repatriation was allowed in the safe zones. Fixed traffic points were located throughout the area to facilitate access to the fire areas for emergency personnel.
- At the height of the operations, over 700 law enforcement personnel were deployed for each 12 hour rotating shift. LASD was assisted in its missions through mutual aid by 38 different Los Angeles and Orange County law enforcement agencies, as well as the California Highway Patrol (CHP). Additionally, over 800 civilian volunteers from various law enforcement affiliated agencies provided in excess of 5,500 man hours of service. LASD's Volunteer Search and Rescue Teams and the County Disaster Communications Service provided an additional 5,000 plus hours of specialized services.

Department Operations Center:

- LASD's DOC was activated on August 24, 2009, and remained open to support law enforcement resources as long as they were deployed in the field. The DOC was led by a LASD Captain on each 12 hour rotating shift and supported by a staff of LASD members. At the conclusion of the events, DOC Teams 1, 2, and 3 had been utilized.
- At the peak of operations, the DOC staffed 14 personnel on each team and was supported by personnel from EOB. EOB staff provided training, guidance, and subject matter expertise to the DOC teams throughout the fire event.
- The DOC provided multi-agency coordination between the IMTs and the responding units. The DOC also provided logistical support to acquire the vehicles, safety equipment, and command posts needed for this event.

Mass Notification System - Alert LA:

- LASD has met with its agency partners to review procedures for the initiation of the mass notification system – Alert LA. These meetings clarified the proper use of the system and addressed problems related to identifying appropriate areas

for evacuation and other emergency related instructions. Alert LA procedures are in place for use in the current Foothills Incident Plan and are available for any other required emergency notifications.

Recommendations

There are no recommendations from LASD.

Los Angeles County Department of Public Works

Findings

In the response phase of the incident, the Department of Public Works (DPW) provided support services to the USFS, LACoFD, and others represented at the ICP. As the incident was being contained and after entry clearance was obtained, DPW shifted into a recovery phase and performed lead assessment and recovery services. With full containment and the start of the storm season, DPW is working with LACoFD, LASD, and others on mitigation and improved response efforts for upcoming storms and mud/debris flow. Listed below are some of DPW's activities:

- DPW field crews worked closely with USFS and LACoFD to ensure the safety of residents by clearing roads, installing barricades, and closing roads as requested by the Incident Commander.
- DPW's Engineering Advice Teams quickly assembled to conduct field reconnaissance and provide engineering advice to communities within the affected cities and unincorporated County areas.
- Four of the five DPW general aviation airports sustained fueling operations for aerial fire suppression efforts.
- DPW worked closely with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and USFS to ensure roads and highways within the forest area were repaired and quickly reopened. Coordinated repairs included the replacement of guardrails, striping, and tree removal, as well as the placement of signage necessary as a result of the incident.
- DPW, along with USFS, LACoFD, LASD, CEO, OEM, and others, created an IMT to plan and prepare for potential hazards within this storm season known as the Foothills Incident. Incident Command consisted of LACoFD, LASD, and DPW to collaborate on evacuation and rescue efforts.

- DPW, along with a variety of agencies, created the Coordinated Agency Recovery Effort to provide information and outreach to those constituents impacted by the fires.

Recommendations

- For the OA (specifically within the unincorporated areas), improved coordination and communication on the closure of roadways among law enforcement, fire agencies, and DPW is needed to ensure all agencies have the latest road closure information. This will also benefit the general public as up-to-date closure information will assist them in planning their commute.
- For the OA (specifically within the unincorporated areas), include Caltrans and DPW in the decision-making process before reopening roadways to ensure that the roadways are safe for travel. As the fire threat subsided, roadways were reopened to the general public without first inspecting the roadway and implementing remedial measures.

Los Angeles County Internal Services Department

Findings

- During the Station Wildfire, the Internal Services Department (ISD) supported efforts to help restore service to the communications site that was impacted at Mount Disappointment. Back-up equipment, supplies, and fuel were provided when access to the site was given to crews by the USFS. ISD will be providing ongoing support for the next several months until full restoration is completed at the site.
- In the Wrightwood and Valencia areas, ISD provided back-up communications services to LACoFD and LASD.
- ISD also provided support for the American Red Cross (ARC) shelters that were set up in La Cañada, Verdugo Hills, and Santa Clarita.

Recommendations

There are no recommendations from ISD.

Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services/American Red Cross

Department of Public Social Services

Findings

- Effective August 28, 2009, DPSS Emergency Management staff was on 24-hour call to coordinate/monitor care and shelter operations.
- On September 1, 2009, DPSS staff was deployed to the CEOC to coordinate care and shelter operations in support of ARC.
- Monitored Station Wildfire activity and sent updates to DPSS executives and support departments/agencies (i.e., Emergency Network Los Angeles, Salvation Army, County 211, etc.)
- Responded to care and shelter inquiries from Federal Emergency Management Agency, CalEMA, OEM, County departments, Board offices, non-profits, media, and the public.
- Submitted Resource Request to ISD for seven swamp coolers to help cool down non-air conditioned shelters. ISD arranged for the delivery and installation of the swamp coolers in an expeditious manner.
- Contacted California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to arrange for the delivery of 40 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) cots from their local warehouse to accommodate individuals with specific needs and who have difficulty sleeping on traditional cots. CDSS made the necessary arrangements.
- CalEMA also arranged for delivery of seven additional ADA cots from their warehouse in Sacramento. The State allowed ARC to keep the ADA cots in their storage trailers for future use. There is currently no cache of ADA cots readily available for use by DPSS/ARC in shelters, and supplies are not always available from other agencies.
- Thirty-four DPSS In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) workers contacted 117 at-risk IHSS consumers in the impacted area to check on their well-being.
- Four victims of the Station Wildfire were assisted in receiving Section 8 housing vouchers.

Recommendations

Consider grant funding to purchase additional ADA cots that can be stored in ARC supply trailers to be readily available after an emergency occurs.

American Red Cross

Findings

- Thousands of residents evacuated their homes during the Station Wildfire and ARC responded in full force by opening five shelters in Los Angeles County.
- To improve coordination of care and shelter operations, ARC conducted daily conference calls with all of the ARC Chapters in Los Angeles County. This improved communication and streamlined coordination.
- Shelters were opened for over a week providing overnight stays for 646 people.
- Nearly 500 ARC volunteers assisted their neighbors during the latest fires, providing 8,933 meals, 13,391 snacks, and over 500 comfort kits comprised of hygiene items (i.e., shampoo, soap, and toothpaste) for the victims.
- An ARC volunteer hotline was activated during the fires, and volunteer orientations were held for 70 people who wanted to assist those affected by the fires and future disasters.
- Goodwill Industries (Goodwill) activated a special disaster policy to accept clothing and household donations on behalf of Southern California wildfire victims being assisted by ARC. People whose homes were damaged or destroyed by the fires were eligible for free vouchers redeemable at Goodwill retail stores.
- ARC continues to provide services to individuals and families whose homes were damaged or destroyed by the fire. Assistance includes counseling and referrals, as well as emergency financial aid for groceries, clothes, household items, and medicines.

Recommendations

There are no recommendations from ARC.

Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care and Control

Findings

ACC field response time was very effective due to the organization of strike teams stationed in several geographical locations. Improvements in this area may be possible by future enhancement of communications abilities (see below). Due to the large scale of this activation, field staff often worked long shifts. Due to the long commutes for some of the employees, sleeping between shifts in personal vehicles was necessary. Total field enforcement hours were a majority of the total hours logged. The addition of a mobile command unit would greatly enhance the efficiency of the activated field units.

The following represents a summary of the activities completed by ACC:

- Staffing - 100 personnel expended nearly 3,000 hours responding to the Station Wildfire.
- Volunteer Services - 39 volunteers contributed over 2,143 hours in community service assisting ACC during the Station Wildfire.
- ACC Vehicle Mileage – ACC staff accumulated over 10,000 miles of travel during response activities to the Station Wildfire.
- Animals Evacuated/Housed - 213 horses, 3 ponies, 2 burros, 3 donkeys, 9 chickens, 6 ducks, 12 rabbits, 4 canaries, 1 turtle, 22 cats, 73 dogs, and 40 other miscellaneous animals including sheep, pigs, goats, and llamas.

Communications:

A. Inter-departmental

During this activation, there were several volunteer ham radio operators available. Older department radio equipment proved to be ineffective in many affected areas. The voluntary use of personal cellular phones proved to be the most effective method of inter-departmental communications. A designated emergency operations cellular phone used by the ACC representative at the ICP was determined to be necessary to improve the effectiveness of communications in this area.

B. Inter-agency

Communications between department representatives, LACoFD, LASD, and other agencies was difficult for many reasons:

1. No availability of intercommunications on LACoFD/LASD designated radio frequencies.
2. ACC was requested to be staged at a different location than the ICP for the majority of the activation.
3. ACC had no designated seat at the CEOC. On September 1, 2009, a CEOC seat was provided for ACC. The on-site ACC representatives greatly enhanced the coordination of ACC activities with other agencies responding to the Station Wildfire.

External Agencies Involved with Animal Care and Control Issues:

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) of Los Angeles voluntarily responded to assist in evacuations on August 28, 2009, and remained available for help and support throughout the remainder of the activation.

The Pasadena Humane Society and SPCA (PHSSPCA) was activated for the Station Wildfire evacuations in La Canada and were stationed at La Canada High School for evacuated residents with small animals. They set up a temporary field sheltering site with an approximate capacity of 20.

Conflicting public information messages caused several problems with this arrangement. The ACC's message was to bring animals from County jurisdictions within Los Angeles County to the Baldwin Park Shelter. This conflicted with PHSSPCA'S message to bring pets to the high school. Capacity at the temporary shelter was quickly filled by the many evacuated animals from La Crescenta. A recent meeting with PHSSPCA has resolved the communications problem. Future problems, such as this, are not likely to occur.

The City of Los Angeles' Department of Animal Services was not officially activated until August 30, 2009. The problem with this late activation was that several evacuated equines from Los Angeles City's jurisdiction were being housed at the Hansen Dam Equestrian Center. This sheltering site was not officially opened or staffed by ACC, as plans to open Pierce College were in progress. There are no verbal or written agreements with Hansen Dam and ACC for equine housing. Hansen Dam has primarily been a City of Los Angeles designated equine housing location.

Most of the horses housed at Hansen Dam were not properly impounded or identified – most of the arrangements were made between the horse owners and the facility prior to any involvement with ACC. ACC took control of this location with 24-hour staffing on August 29, 2009. Plans for future written agreements with this facility are necessary to avoid these types of inefficiencies.

Animals:

A. Domestic Household Pets

All domestic household pets were housed at ACC animal shelters. The shelters are typically close to full capacity. The possibility of exposure to illness/disease from stray animals is also a reality for these evacuated pets. There are also pet owners that do not want to be separated from their pets. This was clearly seen during the Rancho Palos Verdes/Rolling Hills Fire when pet owners were reported to be housing their small pets in their vehicles that were parked at the ARC shelter. ACC released a press advisory to address this concern and provided field enforcement to ensure the safety and welfare of the animals. For this reason, a mobile animal sheltering trailer is needed to provide temporary housing for displaced pets. The location of this temporary housing would be most beneficial if placed in close proximity to ARC shelters.

B. Livestock

During the Rancho Palos Verdes/Rolling Hills Fire, most livestock owners were taking responsibility for moving their own as well as their neighbor's animals, showing that prior extensive equine emergency planning was very effective in these areas. During the Station Wildfire, there were a total of three sheltering sites open to provide the housing needs of livestock: Hansen Dam, Pierce College, and the Antelope Valley Fairgrounds. Initial problems with the Hansen Dam facility were resolved on August 30, 2009. Plans for future written agreements with this facility are necessary to avoid these types of inefficiencies. Activation of the Pierce College sheltering site was smooth and efficient with no apparent problems.

As the fire moved into the Antelope Valley territories, it became necessary to activate a third sheltering site at the Antelope Valley Fairgrounds. Despite the concurrent occurrence of the annual fair at the facility, the activation was smooth and efficient without any problems.

There are plans for future written agreements with all of these facilities to further enhance the operations and reduce the likelihood for future problems or misunderstandings.

C. Wild Animals

Wild animals displaced by fires are an expected result of all fires. The wild animal problems with the Station Wildfire were primarily with unlicensed wild animal menageries that had no provisions for this unexpected disaster. The results of this were very detrimental. The first incident was a wild animal menagerie in Acton that was previously unidentified. The August 30, 2009, evacuation of two African elephants was inevitable and the fire burned the facility shortly after the elephants were removed. Emergency housing arrangements were being made between the Antelope Valley Fairgrounds and the elephants' owners. This was a very dangerous situation for all involved.

Other dangerous wild animal issues arose with the unplanned evacuation of the Wildlife Waystation. The organization's initial response to the fire began August 30, 2009, with the evacuation of livestock. The threat of fire became worse on August 31, 2009, causing a panicked response by the menagerie operators to remove the wild animals from the facility. Some animals were relocated to the Los Angeles Zoo, where it was reported that some escaped and had to be captured with tranquilizer equipment by zoo staff. Some of the other animals were found to be improperly housed at an inappropriate facility in the Antelope Valley, with others sitting in cages on flatbed trucks. This dangerous situation continued through September 3, 2009. The Wildlife Waystation eventually evacuated all but approximately 30 animals and decided to "Shelter in Place" for the remainder of the fire. Fortunately, the wind changed directions and these remaining animals and their keepers were not harmed. The facility's animals returned as soon as the threat of fire had passed.

Recommendations

- Designate ACC as the lead department for the care and shelter of animals and make permanent its seat in the CEOC.
- Obtain a mobile animal shelter trailer for temporary housing of displaced pets.
- Obtain a mobile command unit to facilitate coordination of field emergency response activities.
- Obtain additional communication equipment capable of interagency communication.

- Develop plans for designated animal care facilities for large and exotic animals. Obtain agreements with designated agencies for the operation of these emergency animal care facilities.

Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation

Findings

The following is a summary of the services provided by the Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks) facilities and employees to assist OEM, LACoFD, LASD, USFS, and other essential agencies as they battled the Morris Fire and Station Wildfire.

- **Crescenta Valley Park** – Used as a command post for LASD for a few days.
- **Eaton Canyon Nature Center** – The parking lot was used as a staging area for three weeks. Fire crews utilized park trails to get to fire breaks, defense lines, a toll road, and beyond. Worked with LACoFD on removing cut tree piles. Fire crews used the nature center for cooling and restrooms. Eaton Canyon Nature Center staff was in daily communication with firefighter teams for two weeks.
- **Placerita Canyon Nature Center** – Served as a meeting location for the Office of Public Safety and one of the Mutual Aid Incident Command Mobile Units. The facility was utilized as a resting area for fire units between deployments. Additionally, Placerita Canyon Nature Center transported and housed evacuated animals from Vasquez Rocks.
- **Devil's Punchbowl Nature Center and Natural Area** – Evacuated animals, computers, and valuables when the fire threatened the facility.
- **Santa Fe Dam Recreational Area** – Served as the main ICP for the Morris Fire from August 25, 2009 through August 31, 2009, and the Station Wildfire from September 1, 2009 through September 28, 2009. Santa Fe Dam staff and several lake lifeguards worked tirelessly with incident commanders, LACoFD, and USFS throughout both fires. LACoFD filled vehicles with water from fire hydrants located at the Santa Fe Dam. USFS was given permission from Army Corps to land emergency firefighting aircraft in and around the Santa Fe Dam.
- **William S. Hart Park** – Transported and housed evacuated animals. Set up Hart Hall as a staging area for animals from the natural areas.

- **Descanso Gardens** – Facilities were used by firefighters for bathing and sleeping. The gardens were opened to the local community free of admission following the worst of the fires. Two storage tanks were utilized by firefighters and were emptied of their combined 300,000 gallons of water. Descanso Gardens will serve as a safe refuge area for evacuees until shelters are set up for flood victims in coordination with DPSS and ARC should the need arise during a flood event.

It would have made our efforts more efficient if Parks had more County-wide Integrated Radio System (CWIRS) radios to communicate, trucks/mules for transporting animals and equipment, and traffic control equipment for setting up staging areas.

Recommendations

Obtain additional CWIRS handheld and mobile radios to enhance communication and coordination during emergency response activities.

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

Findings

The Department of Public Health (DPH) responded to the Station Wildfire when evacuations were initiated on August 26, 2009, and remained deployed until September 17, 2009, although some programs interfaced with the incident for a period after that date. DPH activated its Fire Team on August 27, 2009, consisting of:

- Emergency Preparedness and Response Program, Acute Communicable Disease Control, Office of the Chief Science Officer, Health Facilities Inspection Division, Environmental Health, Community Health Services, External Communications, and Veterinary Health. Also on call, when collaboration between health departments was necessary, was the Pasadena Public Health Department.
- DPH convened conference calls twice a day to receive field reports and to identify DPH concerns associated with the fire.

Assets Deployed to the Field:

1. Representation

DPH deployed a representative to the ICP, initially located at Santa Fe Dam and then moved to Hansen Dam. The representative attended all briefings, as well as meetings held throughout the day and night, and was the primary link between DPH and ICP.

2. Environmental Health Strike Team

Environmental Health deployed its Strike Team to LACoFD's base camp and its Spike Camp in Santa Clarita. Initially, the team inspected the camps' food handling and preparation process, much like a restaurant inspection. As the incident progressed, the Strike Team was asked to monitor the air in the base camp for carbon monoxide and to inspect the sanitization of the showering facilities.

The Strike Team found dangerous levels of carbon monoxide surrounding the media trucks' parking area, and issued orders for the vehicles to stop their engines and generators. The recommendation to LACoFD Command was to relocate the media vehicles away from the main ICP.

Another request from LACoFD Command was to test and monitor the potable water supply. The Mountain and Rural Water Program became involved in the response when 20 small water systems (two were destroyed), located in the forest either lost power, water pressure, or needed to be tested for quality.

Because the program was unable to safely test the water systems, numerous Boil Water Orders were issued in the forest. The water program worked closely with the water system operators to expedite testing and return the systems to normal status.

3. Toxics Epidemiology Program

The Toxics Epidemiology Program (Toxics Epidemiology) worked with the Air Quality Management District to monitor air quality and issue health alerts during periods of poor air quality. There was also an incident where a firefighter was suspected of being exposed to a toxic chemical. Toxics Epidemiology worked with ICP to identify the chemical through clinical evaluation.

4. Acute Communicable Disease Control Program

The Acute Communicable Disease Control Program used its surveillance capabilities to monitor emergency rooms for a rise in breathing problems due to

the smoke from the fires. The results of this work were briefed during conference calls.

5. Veterinary Health

The Veterinary Health Program worked closely with the Wildlife Waystation and Shambala Preserve to ensure the safety of the animals and also helped facilitate the movement of some of the animals as the fire approached. The program also worked with PHSSPCA and ACC.

6. External Communications

The External Communications Unit distributed all alerts and notification to the media during the incident. DPH issued Air Quality Alerts and Boil Water Orders that this unit ensured were distributed.

7. Other Programs Mobilized

Health Facilities Inspection Division: During the evacuation phase of the response, the Incident Commander was provided with detailed locations of Skilled Nursing Facilities (nursing homes) in the evacuation area where assets may need to be deployed for mobility impaired patients who needed to be evacuated.

Community Health Services: DPH would deploy nurses to ARC shelters if the need for first aid providers could not be filled.

The services of these programs were not required during the response, but both were staffed and available to respond.

Recommendations

DPH is equipped with a 45' trailer which serves as their Mobile Incident Command Post. We recommend this trailer be included in future deployment plans to ICP locations to support DPH and other departments that do not have this capability. Doing so offers considerable cost savings to the County.

Los Angeles County Department of Community and Senior Services

Findings

Community and Senior Services (CSS) immediately took action by:

- Contacting CSS managers and staff who are immediate responders.
- Collaborating with City and LACoFD to identify evacuees.
- Identifying seniors and dependent adults within the Adult Protective Services (APS) program who live in the Station Wildfire evacuation area to ensure that all APS clients were safe and out of harm's way.
- Calling each client to ensure their safety and well being. If clients did not respond, APS worked closely with collateral contacts to immediately locate the client.
- Providing resources and services to the Station Wildfire evacuees at both LACs via the Information and Assistance Program.
- Coordinating services for clients who were placed in ARC shelters that may be in need of mental health or relocation services.
- Coordinating with DPH for the availability of using cooling centers as a mechanism for impacted residents of the Station Wildfire due to poor air quality.
- Collaborating with nutrition program contractors to ensure that no interruption or impact on delivery of services to seniors would occur.
- Area Agency responsible for Aging Emergency Coordinators collaborated with OEM's Public Information Officer to provide information to CSS' network of contractors in the event additional services were needed for seniors and disabled adults.
- Responded to care and service delivery inquiries from the California Department of Aging, OEM, County departments, Board offices, non-profits, and the public.

Recommendations

CSS recommends that ARC provide Mass Care and Shelter Training to all CSS immediate responders.

CSS recommends that ARC release sheltered-client names to CSS in order to accurately check and cross reference active clients within CSS.

Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health

Findings

- On August 28, 2009, the Department of Mental Health's (DMH) Emergency Outreach staff was on 24-hour call to support shelter operations.
- On August 31, 2009, DMH Disaster Coordinator was deployed to ICP to obtain fire updates and coordinate ARC shelter response and other community requests.
- Monitored Station Wildfire activity and sent updates to DMH executives and Emergency Outreach Bureau.
- Responded to several community meetings coordinated by LACoFD regarding the Station Wildfire status.
- Offered free counseling sessions to victims and emergency workers impacted by the Station Wildfire.
- Worked with OEM Public Information Officer to release public service announcements regarding free mental health services.
- Conducted an interview with the National Public Radio regarding how to cope with the loss and trauma associated with the fires.
- Provided counselors to support the LACs.
- The primary challenge was the coordination and tracking of field activities.

Recommendations

- Consider grant funding for DMH to purchase mobile command vehicles to support field operations.

Los Angeles County Probation Department

Findings

On Saturday, August 29, 2009, a total of eight Probation Department (Probation) facilities were designated "At Risk" due to the Station Wildfire. These eight facilities were comprised of:

- Two Detention Camps
- One Juvenile Hall
- Five Private Group Homes (with contracts to house Probation youth)

The two detention camps were evacuated, while the juvenile hall and private group homes were on "High Alert" status for possible evacuation and or Shelter in Place activities.

Evacuation Operations for the Two Detention Camps Involved:

1. Camp Karl Holton (located in Little Tujunga) - 90 male juveniles and 15 staff members were transported by Probation resources to nearby Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall (Sylmar).
2. Camp Louis Routh (located in Big Tujunga) - evacuated three staff members. The staff was performing security duties, as the camp was not populated with juveniles due to major physical plant repairs.

While none of the staff nor juveniles were injured, the evacuation process and Shelter in Place activities at Barry J. Nidorf and the private group homes required Probation to make improvements in how it strategically addresses life-safety threats inherent with wildfires.

Probation did not have a trained IMT assigned to the Unified Command Post (UCP); thus, the threatened camps and Probation's DOC Operations Section (Camp Branch) were not receiving real time and accurate information on the fire threat. Probation was not involved in the ICP evacuation planning process.

The evacuation operation was hindered because Probation personnel did not have emergency two-way radio systems, which forced them to rely on Blackberry and cellular phone devices to relay the information in a timely manner to and from the threatened camps' ICP. Camp Branch and transportation resources responded to provide evacuation assistance.

Recommendations

Probation requests to be classified as a first responder for all Probation detention facilities and group homes. Probation also requests to be included in all future emergency preparedness and response grant solicitations so it can acquire sufficient

fiscal, staff, and training resources needed to ensure the life safety of the juveniles and staff located at its 19 detention camps, 3 juvenile halls, 40 area offices, and 114 group home sites located in Los Angeles County and 5 surrounding Southern California counties.

Emergency preparedness and response resources needed by Probation include:

- Mobile Command Vehicle – Fully equipped mobile command vehicles are needed so Probation staff assigned to the UCP can have a hub for field operations.
- Full Time Emergency Operations Division – Probation is responsible for the life safety of these juveniles, staff, and visitors at its various detention facilities, group homes, and area offices (over 150 different facilities). Probation needs to create and staff an Emergency Operations Division.
- Emergency Radio Communications – Probation requires emergency communication equipment that will provide their IMT with access to LASD and LACoFD command at the ICP. Also, more CWIRS devices are needed for its facilities and vehicles with emergency response responsibilities.
- Fleet of Emergency Response Vehicles – Probation requires additional buses, passenger vans, sedans, and sports utility vehicles assigned to their Emergency Operations Division for availability to deploy to any Probation facility located in Southern California.
- Emergency Preparedness and Response Training – Probation personnel need to attend “Train the Trainer” classes in the various emergency preparedness and response topics, so that training can be provided to its 5,000 plus staff.

Disaster Management Area Coordinators – AREA C

(Area C includes the City of La Cañada-Flintridge)

Findings

- Reverse 911 was activated one day before the Station Wildfire started and was utilized to coordinate evacuations of residents.
- ARC did an excellent job setting up and staffing the evacuation centers.

- La Cañada Unified School District was very helpful in setting up their facility to assist with residential evacuations.
- No structures were lost.
- City's Community Emergency Response Team was activated and provided support.
- City website was used to provide residents with the most accurate and up-to-date information possible on an hourly basis.
- All City departments were activated for the Station Wildfire. The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was activated on August 27, 2009, and staffed 24 hours a day until 5:30 p.m. on September 1, 2009. There was one shelter opened at La Cañada High School.
- There was confusion with information coming to the City. Different sources were giving different information and there was no coordination to reconcile the status of the fire response and related City activities.
- Due to the Reverse 911 system being new, there were no set policies in place for use.
- Internal-City decisions were being made in two locations.
- Maps and Incident Action Plans were not consistently sent to the City EOC for information.
- Our liaisons with other County departments were not utilized. There needed to be a LASD and a LACoFD liaison at the City EOC at all times during the event.

Recommendations

Training Opportunities resulting from the Station Wildfire:

- More City staff needs to attend the basic EOC training course at the California Specialized Training Institute.
- La Cañada-Flintridge Council needs to attend an elected official disaster training course.

- More tabletop exercises are needed to keep training fresh and more training is needed for City EOC staff.
- Develop communication protocols for the use of Reverse 911 notifications.

Public Information and Community Outreach

On September 1, 2009, your Board directed the Chief Executive Office (CEO) to work in conjunction with the LACoFD and LASD to:

“Ensure that the information posted on the County’s website about the fires is real-time, accurate, and user friendly and that protocols and procedures are developed to institutionalize the real-time posting of such information/update on natural disaster and other significant incidents in the future.”

The CEO Public Information Office (PIO) has taken steps to develop and implement procedures to post information regarding natural disasters and other significant events utilizing many forms of media, including commercial television and radio outlets, the internet, and call-in telephone information lines (County 211). However, to ensure complete and accurate County information is disseminated to the public, it is not possible to report in “real-time” the activities undertaken by OEM or the CEOC and its emergency management and response partners.

Unlike the “on-site” reporting manner and overall methods used by commercial broadcast news media, County OEM press releases and other County promulgated information from the CEOC requires a strict process of relevant input, verification, and approvals before its release. In accordance with established procedures, all information pertinent to the emergency event’s response activities must first be reviewed and approved by the Incident Commander before it is released to OEM or the CEOC. At different time intervals, pertinent information is also received from other contributing County departments (e.g. DPW, DPH, ACC, etc.) after their respective verification process and tabulation by OEM for inclusion to the reporting document/press release for publication, dissemination, and posting. As a logistical consequence, County information is not ready for public consumption until on an average of 60-90 minutes following a rapidly changing, ongoing emergency event or circumstance of importance.

Findings

The Station Wildfire incident, the largest fire in Los Angeles County’s annals, presented challenges to the County’s PIOs and the Joint Information System as it involved multiple jurisdictions from Federal, State, County, and local municipalities, departments, and

agencies. More than 50 PIOs were based at the ICPs, but there was no coordinated effort for them to communicate with one another. Each one operated independently until the County PIOs arrived at the ICPs.

The following is a brief summary of the County's emergency public information successes, challenges, and recommendations.

- OEM created a team comprised of a Program Manager and PIO or designee and coordinated all County related emergency public information, press releases, and updates with LASD's PIOs and/or designees at the CEOC.
- The PIO team typed and emailed all County related emergency public information, press releases, and updates to the CEOC, OEM, LASD staff, elected officials, media, and interested parties through the County's Blackberry. Without it, emergency public information and updates would have not been provided in a timely fashion as the County's information technology system did not function consistently at the ICPs. This could have been due to the remoteness of their locations in addition to the hot weather which reached 100 degrees.
- The PIO team developed protocol and procedures for posting emergency public information, press releases, and updates on the County's internet-based website, County 211, and elected officials' methods of communications.
- OEM assigned its lead PIO to the Station Wildfire ICPs, which allowed for a coordinated effort as well as streamlined the process for gathering and approving County related emergency public information from first responder departments and agencies to the CEOC, elected officials, media, and interested parties.
- The PIO team implemented the County's PIOs Communications Network comprised of first responder departments and community partners. The network streamlined the process of gathering, confirming, and disseminating County related emergency public information to the CEOC, elected officials, media, and interested parties. During the Station Wildfire, the network expanded to include other counties, cities, unincorporated areas, and elected officials' press deputies, and PIOs.
- At the start of the Station Wildfire and throughout the incident, Federal and local municipalities, departments, and agencies operated in their own individual professional silos which resulted in a lack of coordination of emergency public information. These departments and agencies posted emergency public information and updates on their websites, blogs, and other methods of

communications. For example, USFS and LACoFD assigned staff to work at the LACoFD's Information Center.

- The staff posted emergency public information that came from the field about mandatory evacuations and street/road closures, but the information was never shared or confirmed with CHP, LASD, Los Angeles City Police Department, nor DPW who were actually coordinating these operations.
- County-related information was not being coordinated through one source, thus leading to the release of multiple messages that were received by residents, elected officials, media, and interested parties. In a crisis situation, the message from the County must be consistent and concise. The County needed to have an Incident Command or Information Center to coordinate all County related emergency public information, press releases, and updates.
- Information Technology Systems did not operate on a consistent basis at the ICPs. County PIOs had to borrow wireless air cards from a telecommunications company in order to coordinate all County related emergency public information, press releases, and updates. Also, another contributing factor was the County PIOs had different versions of computer software programs that led to other PIOs not being able to receive and/or open files.
- Residents, elected officials, media, and interested parties were utilizing new technological websites in obtaining the Station Wildfire emergency public information, press releases, and updates. County PIOs were not allowed access to these new technological websites, such as Twitter and Facebook, due to County information technology policies.

Recommendations

- Create a Standard Operating Procedure between OEM, CEO Public Affairs, and ISD Help Desk for posting emergency public information, press releases, and updates on the County's internet-based website before, during, and after hours of operation, including holidays.
- Develop an exclusive "Disaster/Emergency" webpage on the County's internet-based website that would provide emergency public information, press releases, and updates, as well as links to the County's first responders' websites. Also, utilize the universal disaster/emergency symbols and provide a brief explanation about the purpose of the webpage.

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- Continue the process of training OA departments and agencies, in addition to government elected officials and their staff, on the roles and duties that is expected of them during a disaster/emergency in accordance with the County's Emergency Public Information Annex.
- Grant permission for County first responder PIOs to have access to new technological websites such as Twitter and Facebook.

If you have any questions, please contact me or your staff may contact Deputy Chief Executive Officer Jacqueline White, Public Safety, at (213) 893-2374.

WTF:JAW:JSF
KH:JT:lbm

Attachment

c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors
 County Counsel
 Sheriff
 Animal Care and Control
 Community and Senior Services
 Fire
 Internal Services
 Mental Health
 Parks and Recreation
 Probation
 Public Health
 Public Social Services
 Public Works

STATION WILDFIRE AFTER ACTION REPORT

Glossary of Acronyms/Terms

ACC	Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care and Control
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ARC	American Red Cross
CalEMA	California Emergency Management Agency
CalTrans	California Department of Transportation
CDSS	California State Department of Social Services
CEO	Chief Executive Office
CEOC	County Emergency Operations Center
CHP	California Highway Patrol
County 211	Info line of Los Angeles
CSS	Los Angeles County Department of Community and Senior Services
CWIRS	Countywide Integrated Radio System
DMH	Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health
DOC	Department Operations Center
DPH	Los Angeles County of Public Health
DPSS	Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services
DPW	Los Angeles County Department of Public Works
EOB	Emergency Operations Bureau
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
Goodwill	Goodwill Industries
ICP	Incident Command Post
IHSS	In-Home Supportive Services
IMT	Incident Management Team
ISD	Los Angeles County Internal Services Department
LACoFD	Los Angeles County Fire Department
LASD	Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department
OA	Operational Area
OEM	Office of Emergency Management
Parks	Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department
PHSSPCA	Pasadena Humane Society and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
PIO	Public Information Officer
Probation	Los Angeles County Probation Department
SPCA	Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
UCP	Unified Command Post
USFS	United States Forest Service